DC COMICS
VERTIGO

JOE R. LANSDALE

BLOOD AND SHADOWS

MARK A. NELSON

BLOOD & SHADOWS

BOOK TWO

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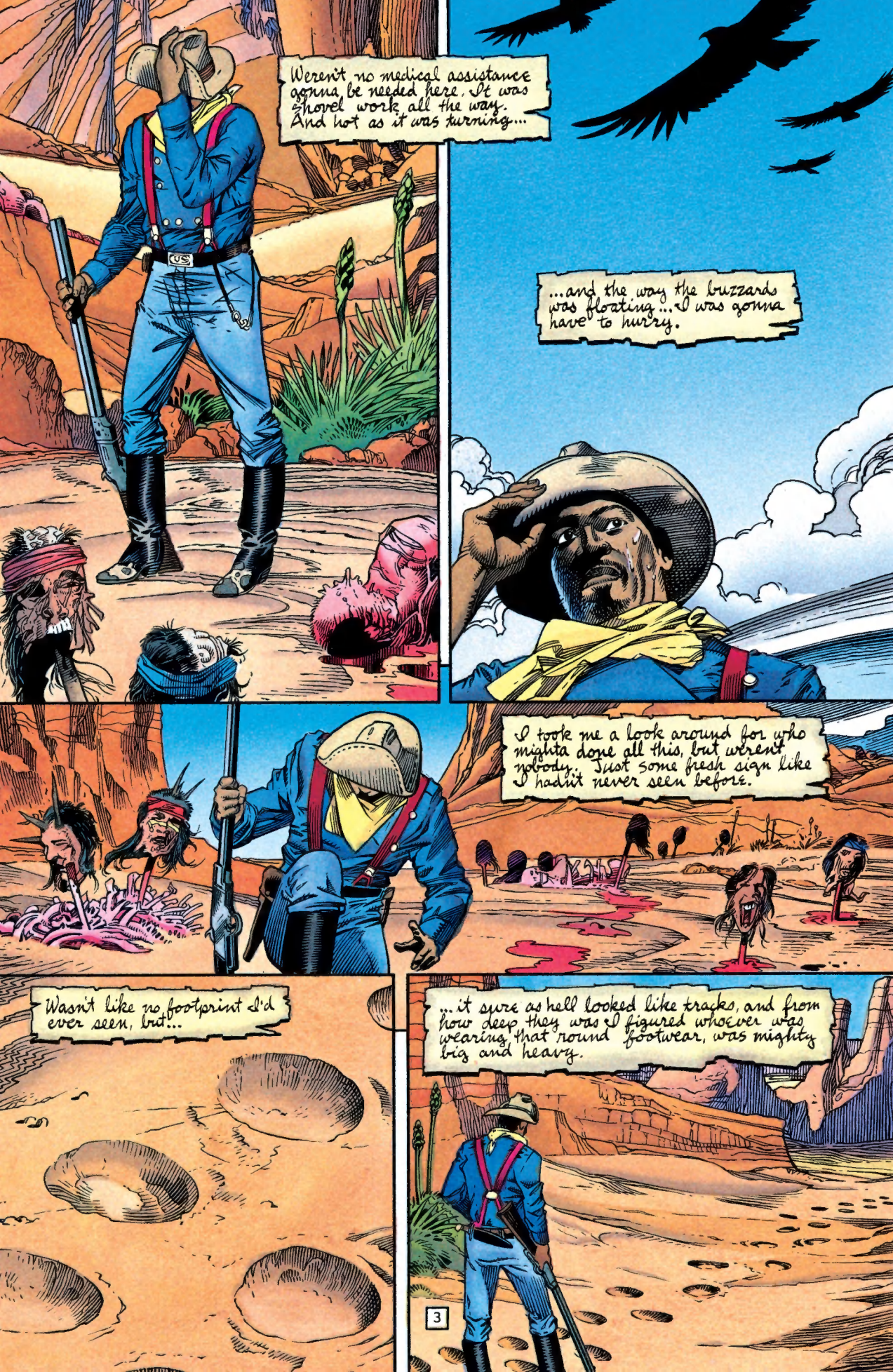
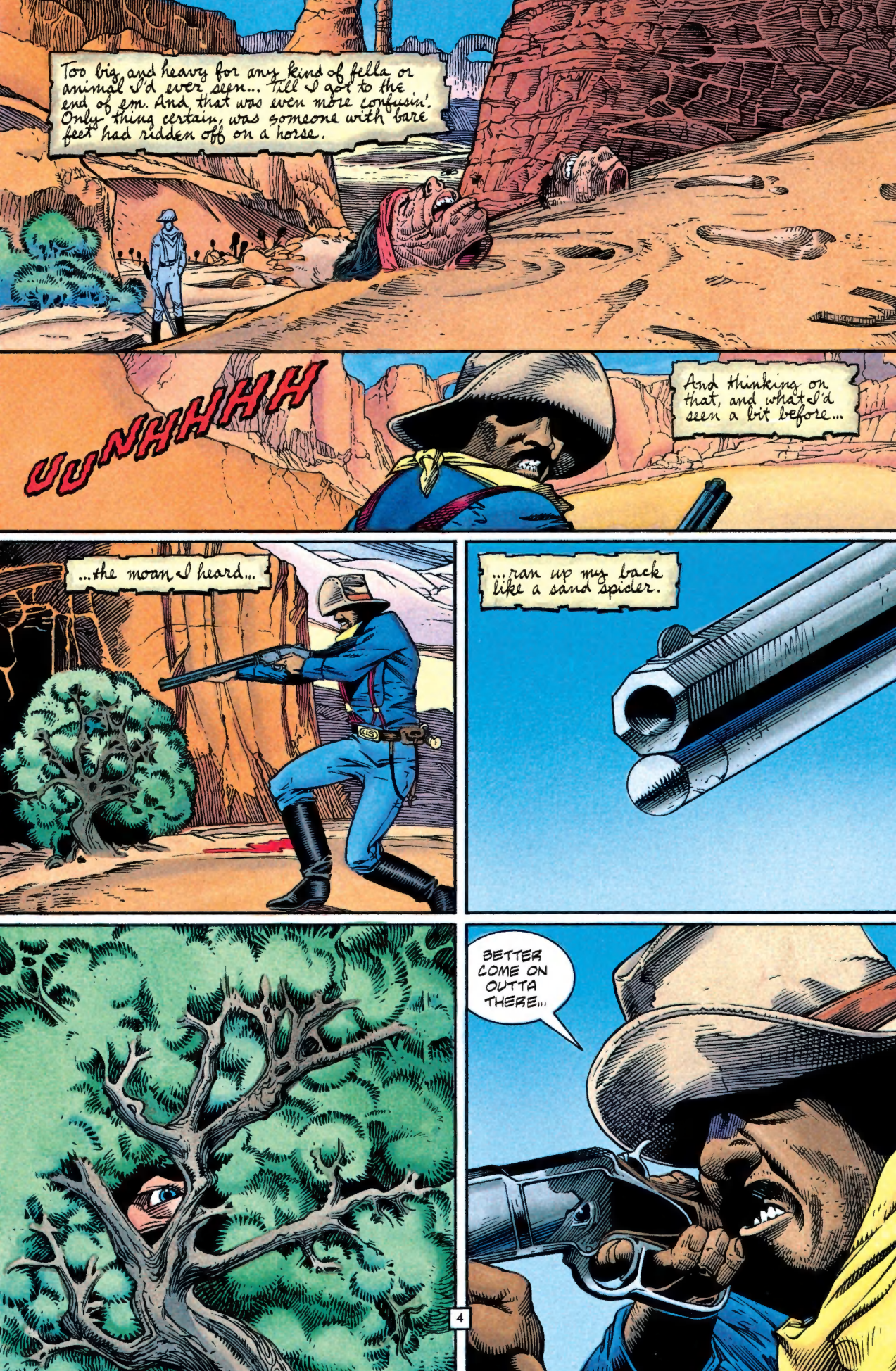
From the journal of Justice Jones...
J. Jones 1876
There was 'Pache and soldiers both. It didn't look to be the work of neither of them folks, and I didn't see no sign of another tribe. But I could still hear screaming.
EEYAAAEEEEEE
There was a deep draw on the other side of the one I'd come up on, and I went careful like on over there, ready to take me a look, and wishing I'd just take my butt on away from there.
But I reckon of all us kids, Momma Jones, through no fault of her own, raised at least one ignorant fool of a boy.
1

Nothing was moving down there, but that's where the screaming had been coming from, so I figured whoever had been doing it had just finished up.
Since I hadn't gotten no smarter in the last few minutes, I climbed down for a closer look.
Reckon there'd been a mama grizzly bear there, I'd have wanted to put my head in her mouth just to see how much of her breakfast was hung 'tween her teeth.
Nobody jumped out and said boo to me.
2


Weren't no medical assistance gonna be needed here. It was shovel work all the way. And hot as it was turning...
...and the way the buzzards was floating...I was gonna have to hurry.
I took me a look around for who mighta done all this, but weren't nobody. Just some fresh sign like I hadn't never seen before.
Wasn't like no footprint I'd ever seen, but...
...it sure as hell looked like tracks, and from how deep they was I figured whoever was wearing that round footwear, was mighty big and heavy.
3


Too big and heavy for any kind of fella or animal I'd ever seen... Till I got to the end of em. And that was even more confusin'. Only thing certain, was someone with bare feet had ridden off on a horse.
UUNHHHH
And thinking on that, and what I'd seen a bit before...
...the moan I heard...
...ran up my back like a sand spider.
BETTER COME ON OUTTA THERE...

...OR, I'LL PUT ONE IN YOU.
MAYBE... TWO...
...HELP ME...
WELL, I'LL BE... DAMNED.

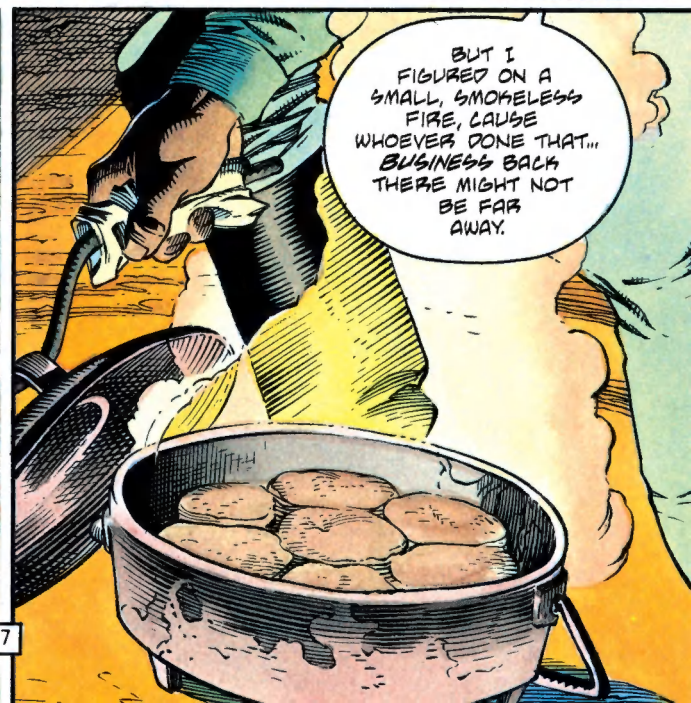
THOUGHT MAYBE YOU WAS GONNA SLEEP TILL TOMORROW, WAY YOU WAS TUCKERED OUT.

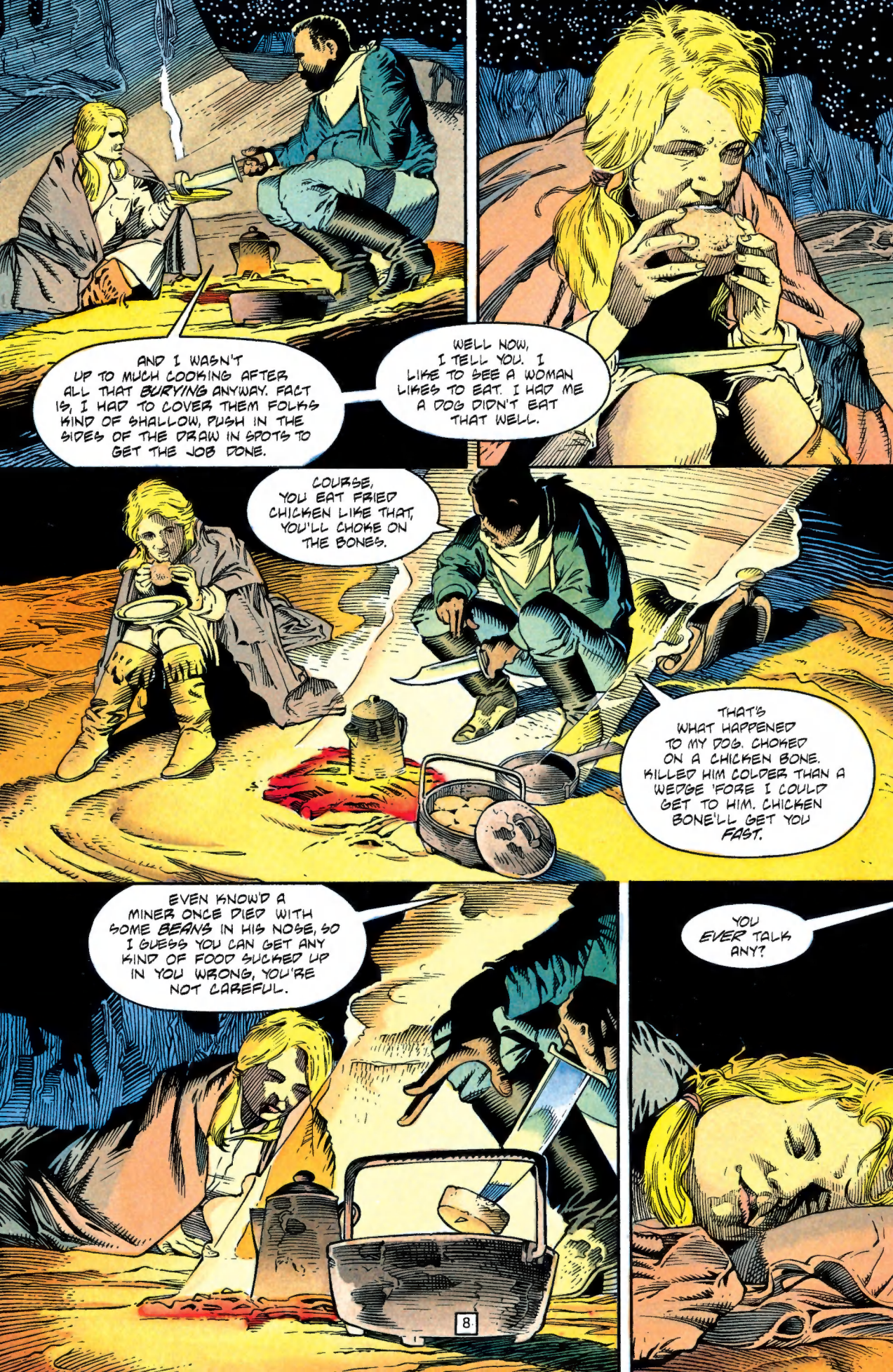
THIS HERE BACON IS GOOD AND SALTED. AIN'T BUT A LITTLE SPOILED ROUND THE EDGES.
I GOT SOME BISCUITS COOKING IN THE GROUND.

AND I'LL TELL YOU RIGHT UP FRONT, AIN'T AN OLD GRAY-HAIRED MAMA OR GRANDMAMA CAN OUTDO ME FOR BISCUITS.

YOU DIE AND GO TO HEAVEN, THESE BISCUITS GOD HIS OWN SELF'LL BE SERVING.
SURPRISED HE AIN'T ALREADY ASKED ME FOR MY RECIPE.

MIGHT'A GOT MORE *EXTRAVAGANT* IN MY COOKING HAD I NOT MINDED A LOTTA SMOKE.

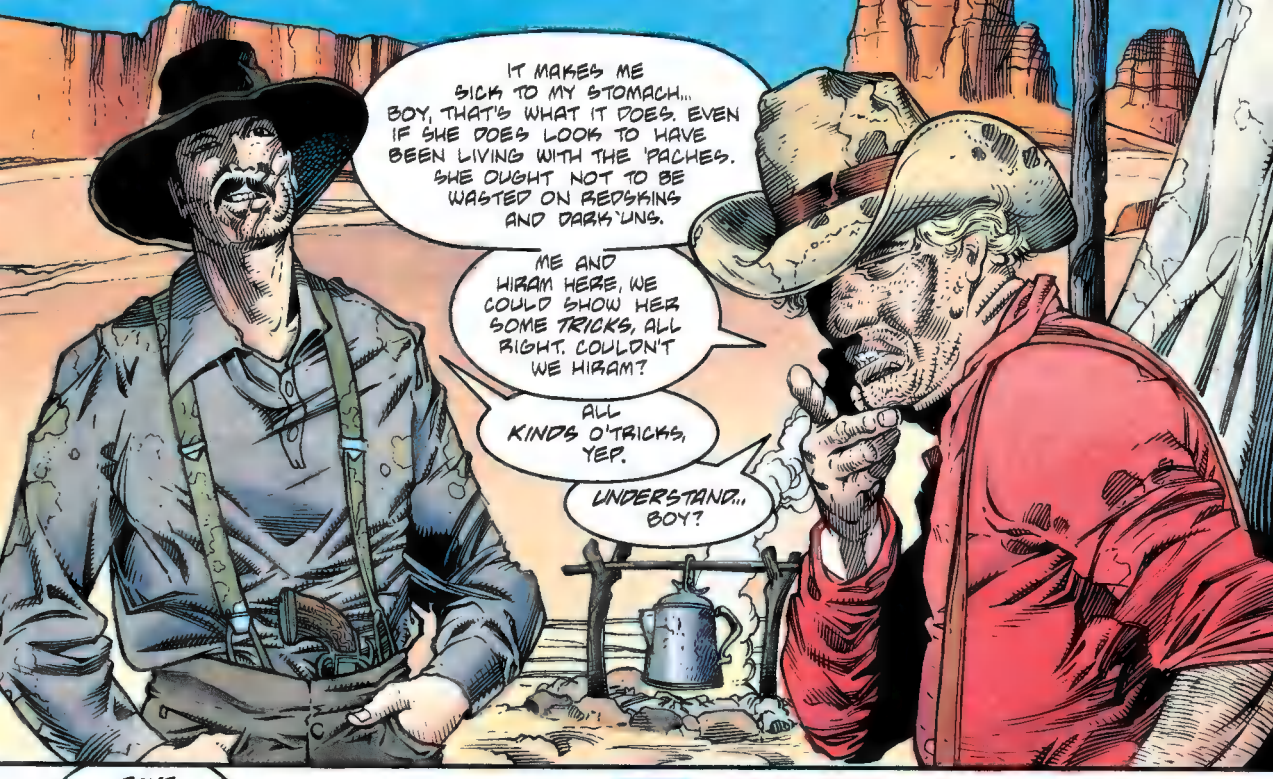

BUT I FIGURED ON A SMALL, SMOKELESS FIRE, CAUSE WHOEVER DONE THAT... *BUSINESS* BACK THERE MIGHT NOT BE FAR AWAY.


AND I WASN'T UP TO MUCH COOKING AFTER ALL THAT *BURYING* ANYWAY. FACT IS, I HAD TO COVER THEM FOLKS KIND OF SHALLOW, PUSH IN THE SIDES OF THE DRAW IN SPOTS TO GET THE JOB DONE.
WELL NOW, I TELL YOU. I LIKE TO SEE A WOMAN LIKES TO EAT. I HAD ME A DOG DIDN'T EAT THAT WELL.
COURSE, YOU EAT FRIED CHICKEN LIKE THAT, YOU'LL CHOKE ON THE BONES.
THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO MY DOG. CHOKED ON A CHICKEN BONE. KILLED HIM COLDER THAN A WEDGE 'FORE I COULD GET TO HIM. CHICKEN BONE'LL GET YOU *FAST*.
EVEN KNOW'D A MINER ONCE DIED WITH SOME *BEANS* IN HIS NOSE, SO I GUESS YOU CAN GET ANY KIND OF FOOD SUCKED UP IN YOU WRONG, YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL.
YOU *EVER* TALK ANY?

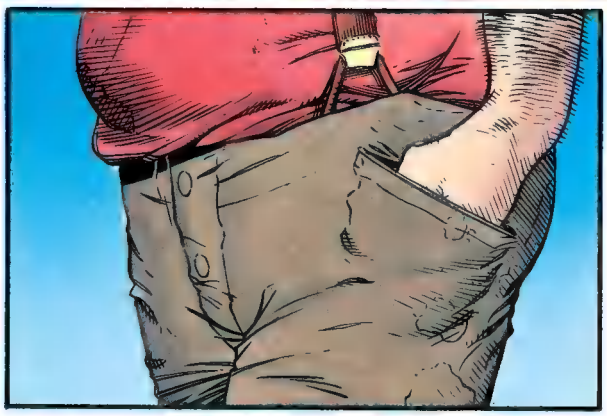
ZZZZZZZZZ
YOU'RE GONNA MISS COFFEE.
AAAOOOOOOOOOOOO
THAT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT AN OLD COYOTE, MA'AM.
HE JUST LIKES TO TALK TO THE MOON SOME.

Maybe that's 'cause he ain't got no one will talk back to him neither.
After breakfast, we set out across the desert.
Which ain't no smart thing to do. It's damn hot.
But I knew where there was a water hole and a little greenery less than three hours away.
10

That figured. Company. And me with a white woman.
Out here you never knew who you were gonna run into, or what they wanted.
YOU DON'T MIND, LADY, WOULD YOU WANDER OFF OVER THERE A WAYS?
WELL NOW, THAT'S A PRETTY PICTURE.
HOWDY.
AIN'T EVERY DAY YOU SEE A BOY LIKE YOURSELF WITH A WHITE WOMAN. IT'S SOME KINDA SIGHT. AND NOT A PRETTY ONE.


IT MAKES ME SICK TO MY STOMACH... BOY, THAT'S WHAT IT DOES. EVEN IF SHE DOES LOOK TO HAVE BEEN LIVING WITH THE 'PACHES. SHE OUGHT NOT TO BE WASTED ON REDSKINS AND DARK'UNS.
ME AND HIRAM HERE, WE COULD SHOW HER SOME TRICKS, ALL RIGHT. COULDN'T WE HIRAM?
ALL KINDS O'TRICKS, YEP.
UNDERSTAND... BOY?

BOY? YOU CALL AN ALLIGATOR A LIZARD? YOU SEE A BOY, GIVE HIM A NICKEL.



ALL RIGHT... BOY.
LIBERTY
IN GOD WE TRUST
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
5
CENTS

HERE YOU GO.

BLAM
BLAM
PING
HERE'S YOUR CHANGE... BOY.
PLUNK

BAM
BAM
BAM
BAM

BAM
BWOLP
BLACK BASTARD!
BAM
GOT YOU, BOY!

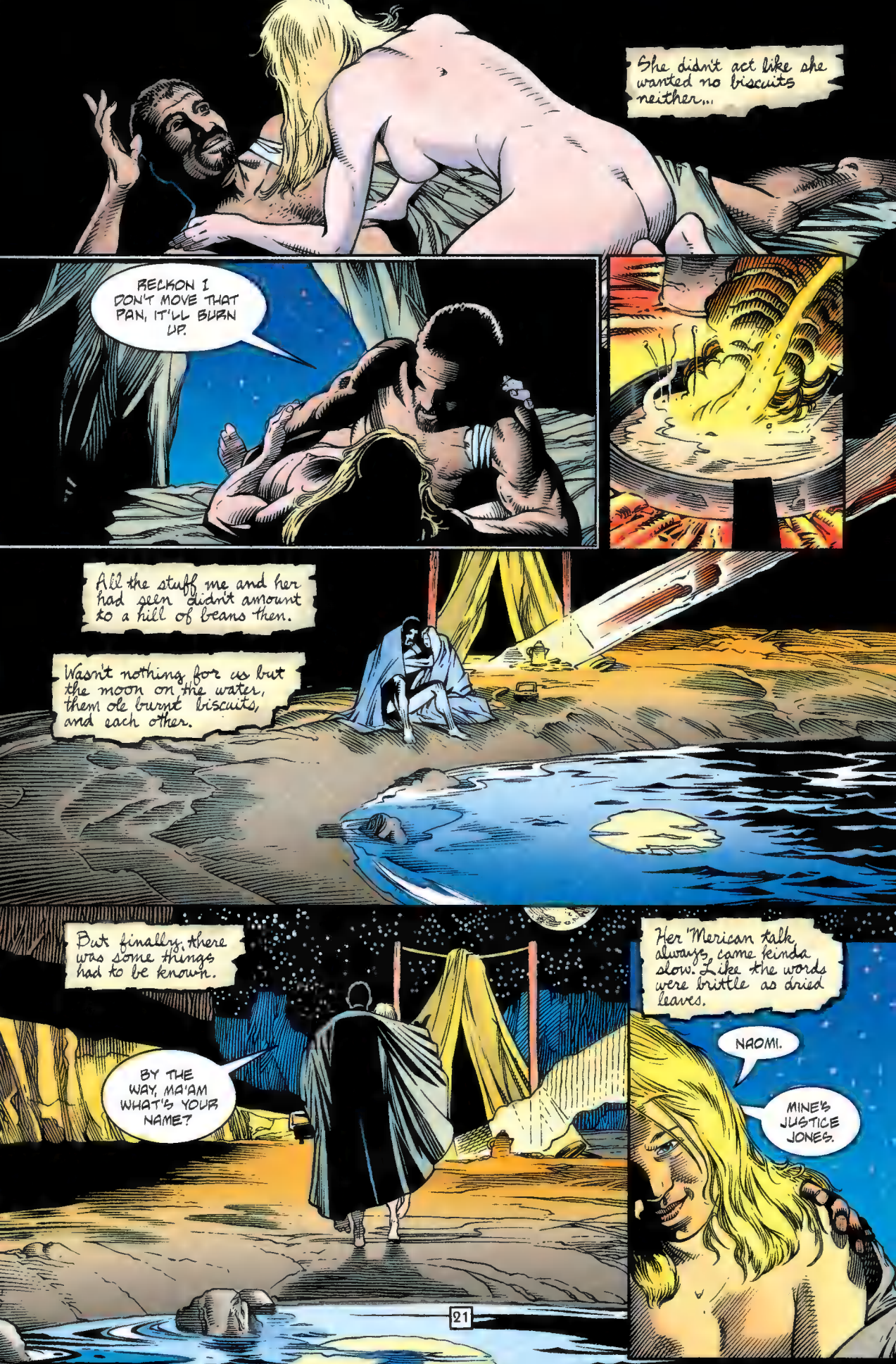
BAM

Hiram's bullet didn't do me no real harm. It went in my shoulder and out. I'd hurt myself worse passing gas.
But the woman made me a mud and leaf poultice and bound me up good and tight just the same.

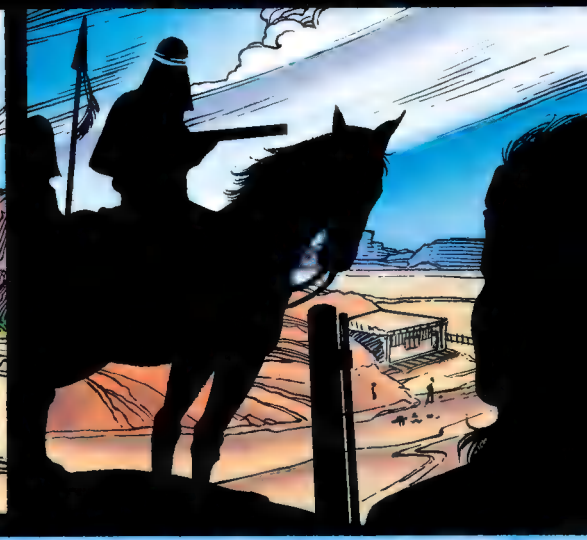
TING
PLINK
18

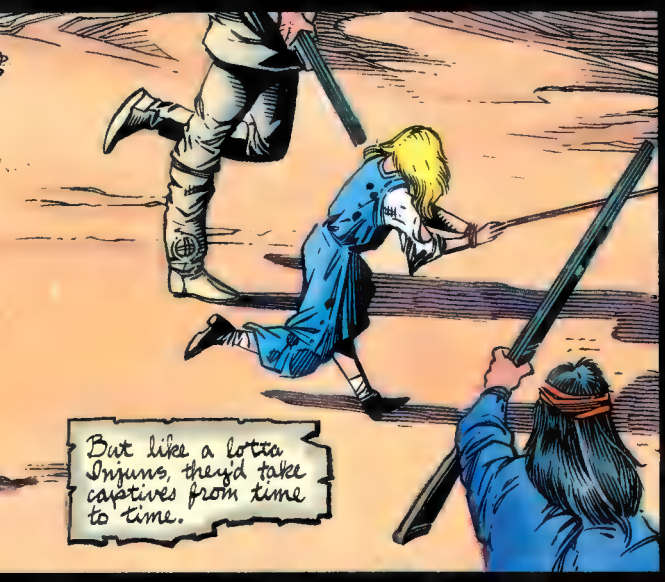
NICE CATCH. BOY!
GOD. HERE'S TWO MORE FOR YOU. WAY I SEE IT, I WAS YOU, I'D GIVE 'EM TO THE OTHER FELLA... I DON'T THINK YOU WANT THEM. 'COURSE THAT'S UP TO YOU. JUST GIVING AN OPINION. AMEN.
She wasn't shy none, but I was. I didn't look at her doing what she was doing, but I wanted to.
Well, maybe I did peek a bit.

She looked as pretty as the shine of the moon, smelled as fresh as the night.
HURT?
NO, MA'AM. WANT SOME BACON?
She didn't seem to want no bacon.
Me neither.
RECKON THE BACON'S ALL BURNED UP.
BISCUITS MIGHT BE ALL RIGHT THOUGH.


She didn't act like she wanted no biscuits neither...
RECKON I DON'T MOVE THAT PAN, IT'LL BURN UP.
All the stuff me and her had seen didn't amount to a hill of beans then.
Wasn't nothing for us but the moon on the water, them ole burnt biscuits, and each other.
But finally, there was some things had to be known.
BY THE WAY, MA'AM WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
Her 'Merican talk always came feinda slow. Like the words were brittle as dried leaves.
NAOMI.
MINE'S JUSTICE JONES.

She told me how she came to be with the 'Pache. Her family was trying to homestead, and the 'Pache didn't take kindly to it, since they saw it as their land.
They was quick to let settlers know how they felt 'bout such things.
Naomi found there was worse things than the 'Paches. Like a fella name of Kilgen.




But like a lotta Injuns, they'd take captives from time to time.

Captives was generally treated like slaves. Being the son of an ex-slave, I had me some idea what that was about. Maybe that was why me and Naomi took to one another.

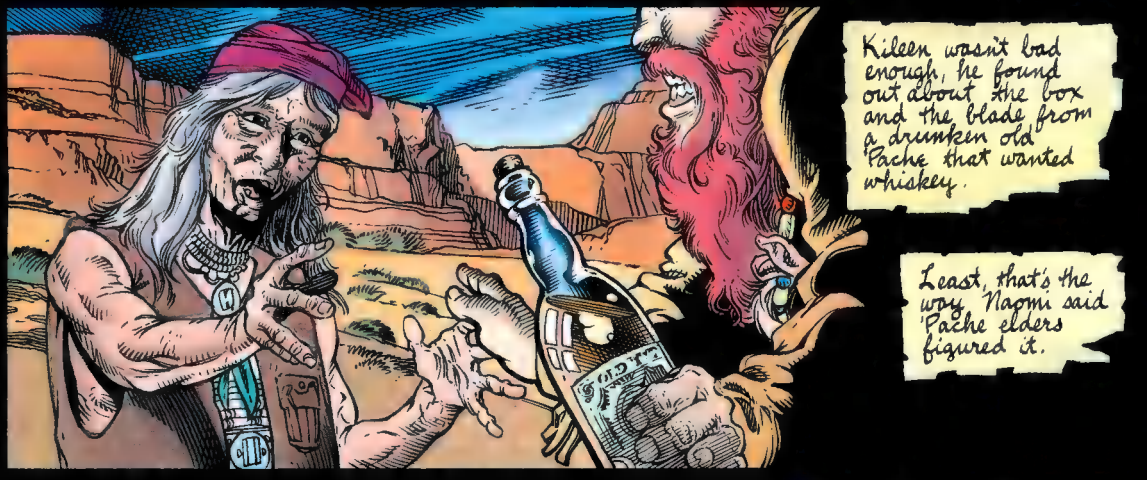
'Paches weren't in love with Kileen none, but he brought them what they wanted in change for certain things.

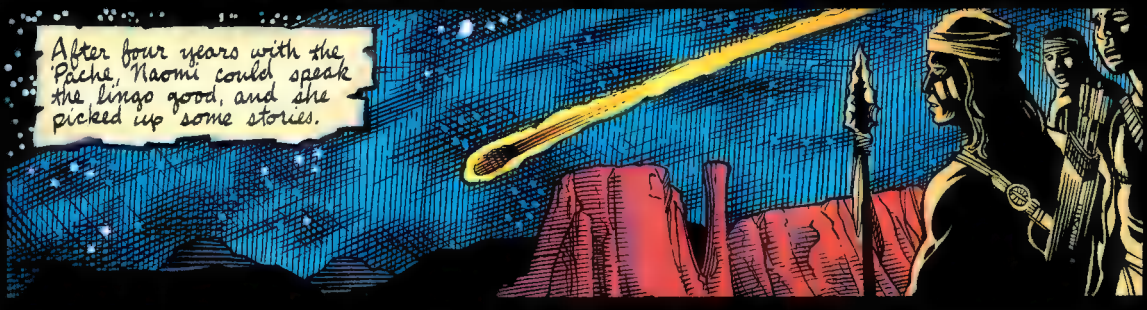
Seemed ole Kileen had him some quirks.
He didn't see no difference in a human or a horse or a dog.
'Cept'n he liked dogs and horses a mite better, and thing was, he didn't like nothing too much.

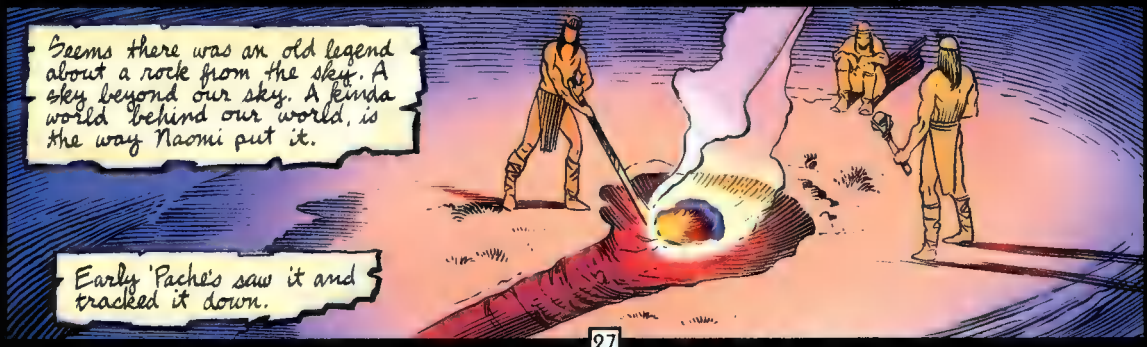
He sure didn't like one of the things he owned trying to hightail it on him.
His punishment in such matters was downright strict.
But reckon you'd have to say it was pretty successful.

Nothing that offended Kileen ever offended him twice.
But according to Naomi, he was a mite sentimental.
Was known to keep little reminders of past acquaintances around to cheer him up.
Spite of his reputation, there were them among the Paches needed what Kileen had, and they'd do anything to get it.

As for Kileen, wasn't nothing to suggest he was mellowing with age.

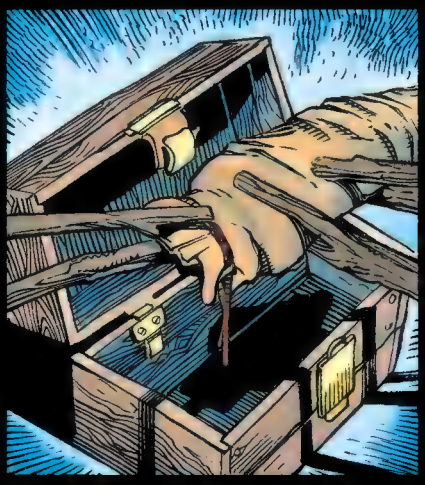

Kileen wasn't bad enough, he found out about the box and the blade from a drunken old 'Pache that wanted whiskey.
Least, that's the way Naomi said 'Pache elders figured it.

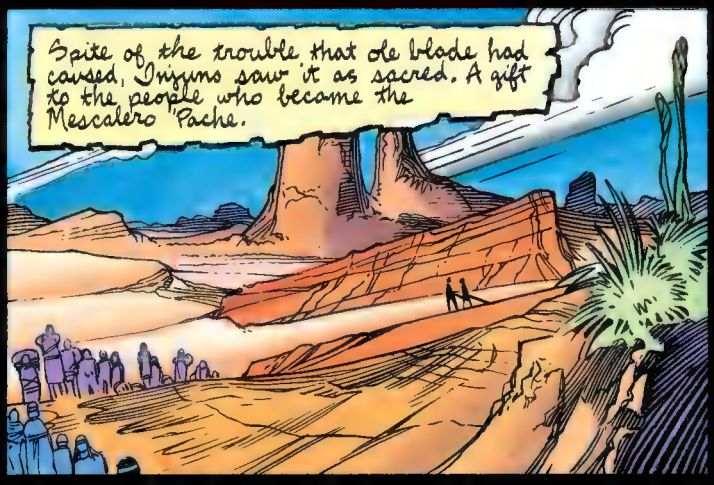

After four years with the 'Pache, Naomi could speak the lingo good, and she picked up some stories.

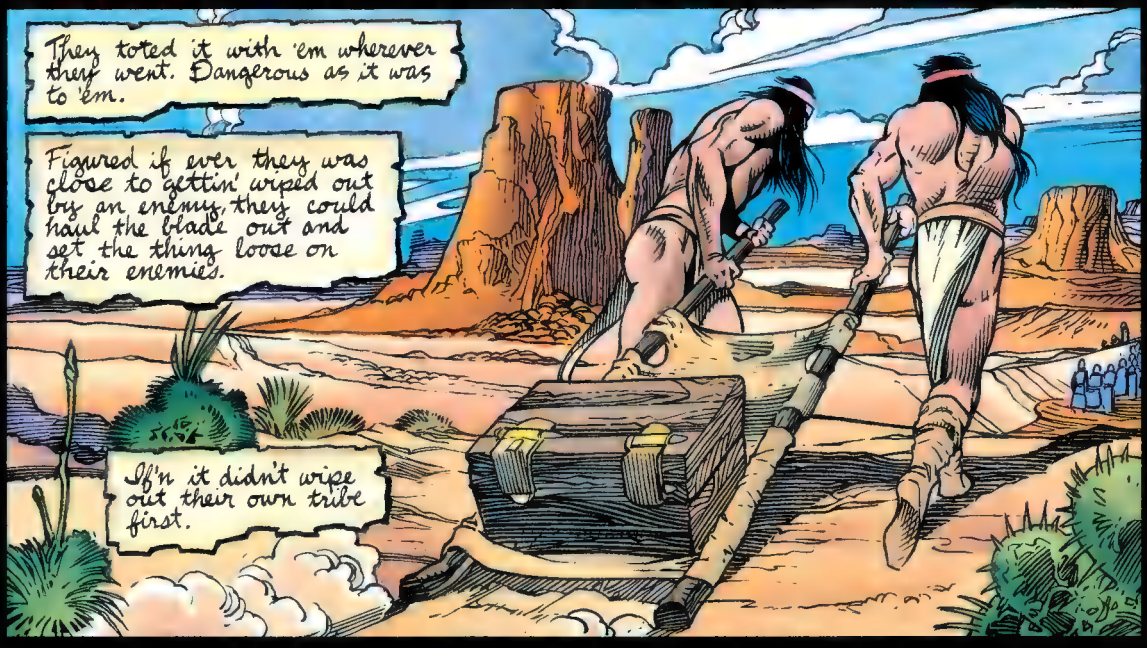

Seems there was an old legend about a rock from the sky. A sky beyond our sky. A kinda world behind our world, is the way Naomi put it.
Early 'Pache's saw it and tracked it down.

It was better stuff than what they made their weapons out of, so they set to work to use it.
It shaped out nice.
But there was some drawbacks.
The blade had a way of turning on its owner. And the owner's blood mixed with moonlight caused some changes.
Though the legends didn't say exactly what kind of changes.
They wasn't changes for the better. And they meant murder.

Some serious damage was done. And more would have been done...
...but the tribe reasoned with the old boy.




Spite of the trouble that ole blade had caused, Injuns saw it as sacred. A gift to the people who became the Mescalero Apache.


They toted it with 'em wherever they went. Dangerous as it was to 'em.
Figured if ever they was close to gettin' wiped out by an enemy, they could haul the blade out and set the thing loose on their enemies.
If'n it didn't wipe out their own tribe first.

They kept it a tribal secret.

The elders hid it each time they camped, and only they knew where it was. The box was their sacred duty.

For a long time things were all right.
Got so the box business was more of a tradition than any real belief in its power.
Maybe that's why that 'Pache elder was willin' to tell it to Kileen. Reckoned it didn't really mean nothing. And again, a man gets hooked on drink, he kinda loses his common sense anyhow.
Whatever, it was quite a story and Kileen liked it.
He thanked his guest for the tale.
Shared a drink.
And considered on it.

He decided to investigate the old boys' story.
Course there was others interested in the 'Paches.
For different reasons.
The elders left two guards.
But the tribe wasn't Kilcen's concern. He followed a handful of elders off from the main camp.

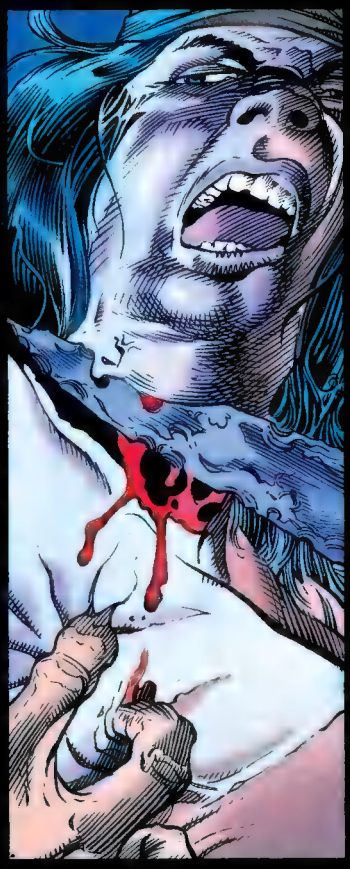
SSSWOO
SHH
SSS

While this was goin' on, the Cavalry paid the 'Paches a visit.
SLAM

AIEEE
BLAM BLAM EEEEE
BAM
BAM
I EEE
AI II EE E
BLAM
BAM

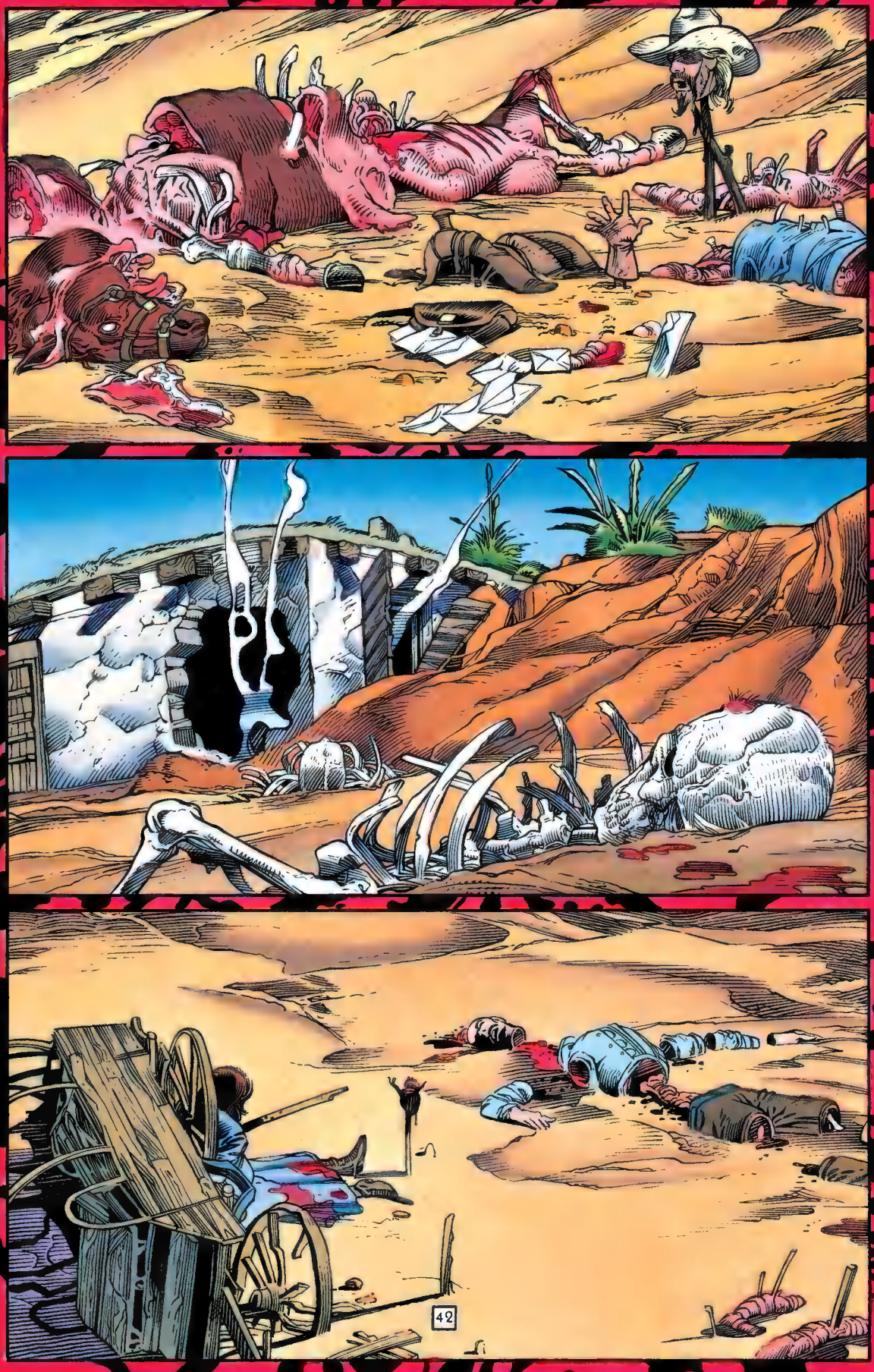
BLAM
BAM
AIEEEE
AAAHH
AAH!!

Busy as everyone was killin' one another, Naomi was able to find her a hiding place without being spotted.



What Naomi saw put her in mind of the stories she'd heard about the box and the blade. And, of course, she'd seen that Kileen fella transform right before her eyes.
I didn't want to believe anything like that was loose on the frontier.
Cause knowing myself as Mama Jones's most foolish boy...
Her story fit with the sign I'd seen. But that didn't make me want to believe it any better.
...I'd probably reckon on doing something about it. She hadn't named me Justice for nothing.

After a day of following Kileen, it come to me, slow like, that maybe my bread wasn't done in the middle.
First, it was damn hot, and second, Kileen was out there, and he wasn't just a bad kinda fella. He was the baddest kinda fella.
He wasn't hard to track, though.
Fact was, he was downright messy as he went.

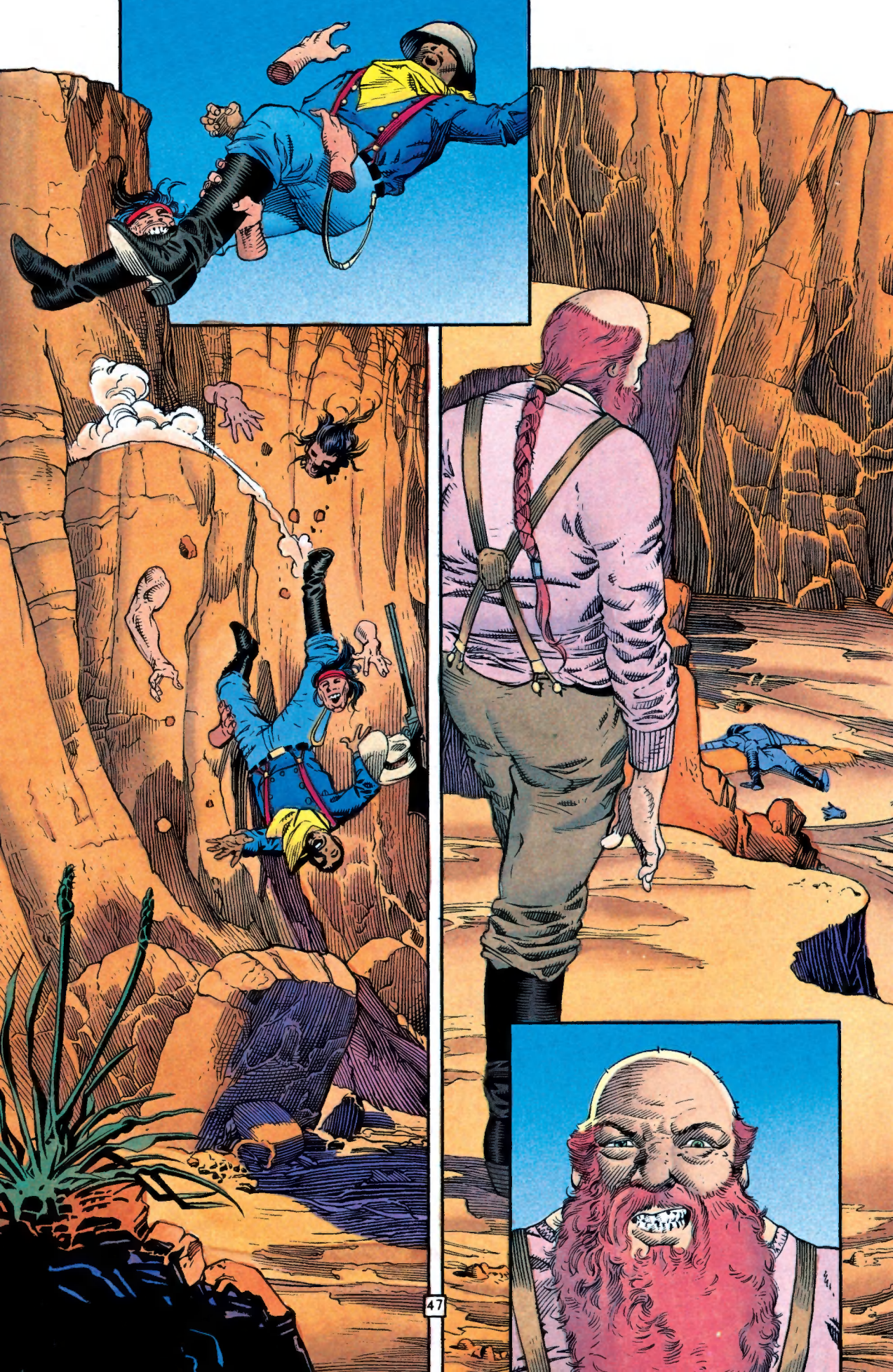


He weren't no critter lover, neither.
He also had distasteful bed habits. And I reckon, a pretty stopped-up nose.

GONNA GO SHOOT HIM TILL I WEAR OUT THE HENRY. BE BACK IN A MINUTE OR SO.
I was bound and determined to shoot Kileen 'fore it got dark. I didn't like to do no shooting after dark 'less I had to. Seemed kinda cowardly to do that.
'Course, things got tight and it was my life or someone else's, I'd shoot a preacher in the back on a moonless night.
Looked like Kileen wasn't the only damn snake in the desert. One of his kinfolks turned up to say howdy.
I figured relatives ought not miss a chance to get together.
I wanted Kileen awake, so I could look him in the eye...
...'fore I put a rifle load between his peepers.

GRUNCH!

Them damn body parts were not only alive and acting as watchdogs, they was sewed together. And it was pretty good sewing at that.



BLAM
BLAM
To be continued.

ITS EVIL IS WITHOUT END...

Chet Daly faced the worst moment in his life and knew the absolute horror was only just beginning.

The east Texas shamus followed a serial killer's blood-smeared trail straight into the lair of The God of the Razor — a demigod with an unquenchable thirst for gore. Now the only thing that can save Chet's lover — and his own sanity — is to track the truth about the timeless monster.

Chet's discovery of the journal of a soldier and scout named Justice Jones may help in his quest. In the man's own words, the book tells a terrifying tale of the old west — and of how the grizzled warrior faced the blade-wielding demon in 1876.

If Chet is to stop the blood-hungry creature, he'll have to unearth secrets from the distant past... and, somehow, from the far-flung future as well.

Best-selling horror and suspense novelist Joe R. Lansdale and acclaimed artist Mark A. Nelson join their prodigious talents to bring you this shocking tale of love, adventure and unending dread.

Suggested for mature readers

SPECIAL DELIVERY

D'ARGH-EMPIRE